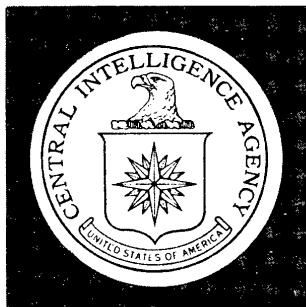




The President's Daily Brief

25 March 1969

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~~Top Secret~~

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25 March 1969

LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF
25 MARCH 1969

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

There were four terrorist attacks in and around Saigon yesterday which killed and wounded a number of South Vietnamese. The major northern cities of Hue and Da Nang were generally free of enemy action.

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MIDDLE EAST

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EUROPE

There is nothing significant to report.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

There is nothing significant to report.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

PAKISTAN

The US Consul in Dacca reports that life in the city seems normal this morning. Businesses are open and street traffic is moving without hindrance. All Americans in the area are safe. West Pakistan is evidently also relatively quiet.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

General Yahya Khan, in a nationwide broadcast this morning, claimed that he will go through with the constitutional reforms promised by Ayub and that he will prepare the country for free elections. (Associated Press)

KOREA

The North Korean news agency announced that border guards killed and wounded most of a US patrol that crossed into North Korean territory today. (FBIS 07 and Reuters 46) the action in fact was a fire-fight between North and South Korean forces; there is no tally of friendly losses.

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

President Thieu's announcement that South Vietnam is ready to hold private talks with the Liberation Front and that Ky has already communicated this to the Front seems calculated to head off a new campaign of criticism in the US against Saigon.

Thieu is probably concerned primarily about the prospect of growing criticism of the war by US Congressmen. He has already shown some anxiety about such pressures on the new US administration

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MIDDLE EAST

The replacement of Bahjat Talhuni as Prime Minister by the more articulate and sophisticated Abd al-Munim Rifai is probably an effort by Husayn to have a strong man on hand during the period of four-power negotiations. The remaining members of the new cabinet are all veteran performers on the Amman political scene and their choice in most cases seems to represent an effort to satisfy various elements within the country. The appointment of the pro-fedayeen Akif al-Fayis as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior may be a reflection of the growing strength of the fedayeen and the King's desire to placate them.

EUROPE

There is nothing significant to report.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

There is nothing significant to report.

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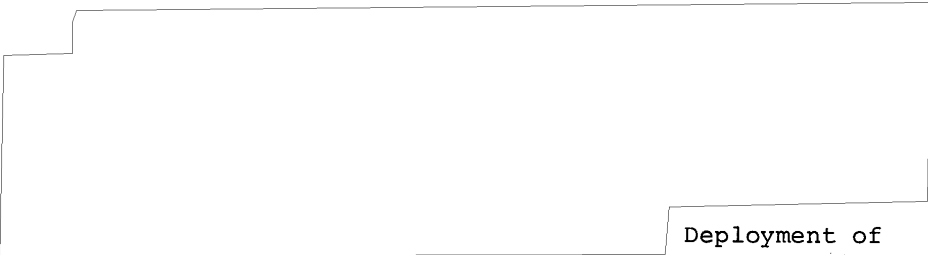
FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

PAKISTAN

Ayub's resignation today is an admission of his failure to halt Pakistan's drift toward chaos. He had hoped to stem the tide with his announcement last month that he would not run for re-election and his accompanying promise of constitutional reform, but these half-measures produced only a brief lull. The decline resumed this month; disruptive strikes brought considerable economic dislocations throughout the country, and East Pakistan slid into anarchy and terror. Although the central government apparently was aware of the situation, it took little remedial action until last week.

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 Deployment of troops in recent weeks indicated that the military was preparing for today's move to martial law.

Yahya Khan--the new commander--is a man of some military ability but not an outstanding leader or one who commands wide respect. He has evidently been loyal to Ayub but may harbor some political ambitions of his own. He gained the top position because he commands the Army--the country's largest military service. The other military figure likely to come into prominence is Air Force chief

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Nur Khan, a competent [redacted] man who probably was denied the top spot in part because he commands a smaller service.

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Whether Yahya Khan and the largely West Pakistani military can succeed where Ayub failed remains to be seen. They should have little trouble handling the remaining unrest in West Pakistan--chiefly labor and communal disturbances. In East Pakistan, however--where the military is viewed as a symbol of the tainted regime and of West Pakistan's long-time domination of the East--their task will be much more difficult. At least for the short run the military will probably move cautiously. [redacted]

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The troops can probably subdue the cities, where less than 5 percent of the province's population of 70 million lives, but control of the countryside is problematic.

The best guess at the moment is that the military intends its intervention as a stopgap measure to restore order and, if possible, to enable the elections to be held later this year. The army, however, may end up questioning the value of holding elections under the present circumstances, especially when the choice would be among disparate and largely discredited political forces unlikely to produce a stable government. Indeed, the military may simply decide that Pakistan cannot yet afford the luxury of democracy and that it must continue to rule the country.

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PAKISTAN - SOVIET UNION

The recent visit of Soviet Defense Minister Grechko to Karachi laid the groundwork for an increasingly close military aid relationship with Pakistan. The discussions two weeks ago centered on broadening the list of military equipment to be supplied under an agreement signed in July 1968.

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NIGERIA

CIA economists have recently examined the Biafran food crisis. They conclude that much of Nigeria's former Eastern Region (which includes Biafra) can expect a serious shortage of food between March and June, a seasonal "hungry period" when caloric intake drops about 20 percent even during normal times. In those areas where the food supply already has been barely adequate to keep the population alive, the lack of both carbohydrates and protein will become even more severe. The shortage of carbohydrates should ease in the summer months when the harvest begins, but a large segment of the population will still need protein from outside sources.

SOVIET UNION - COMMUNIST CHINA

There has been no shooting reported in the area of the disputed island for the past week

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Soviet propaganda on the incidents is still playing largely on patriotic and nationalistic themes. At the same time there is a hint of a shift in Soviet media toward the larger issue of border demarcation. Chinese commentary on the clashes has decreased considerably as Peking has shifted focus to the themes of Soviet "social imperialism" and "collusion with imperialism."

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The Yugoslav press agency has reported that a plenary session of the Soviet Central Committee will be convened in the next few days. The border dispute is a likely topic for such a meeting.

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